

TIBOR S. BORGIDA

Interviewed by: Cliff Groce

Initial interview date: August 20, 1987

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Q: What were the circumstances of your joining the Voice of America?

BORGIDA: I came to the United States in 1939, and my wife got a job immediately with Time Magazine. A year and a half or two years later I was drafted (made 1-A), in Morristown, Pennsylvania, and somebody saw the name there, on Time Magazine, Lelia Lee Borgida, and called her up. "Hey, I've known a Borgida in Prague. Are you related to him?" She said, "Unfortunately, he's my husband." He said, "Please send him up to us, we want to talk to him." "What for?" "My name is Brackett Lewis," he said, "and we are organizing The Voice of America. I used to be in Prague, and I think I played billiards with your husband." This was 1942. I was very reluctant to take a job, since I was waiting to be called up by the army, but he said, "We want to talk to him because he was on Radio Prague." Also, by a coincidence, at Time Magazine there was a lady whose name was Maria DeBlazio, who was in the same capacity as my wife, editorial researcher. She had a brother who was in on the ground floor at the Voice of America. So they both wanted to talk to me. DeBlazio said, "Yes, go there, they're just organizing there now."

At that time I had a job with the Trenton Trust Company in Trenton, New Jersey, where I had got a job because I spoke Hungarian. They opened a branch in a section of Trenton where there was a large number of Hungarian immigrants, and they wanted to put a sign on one of the tellers cages saying, We speak Hungarian. So it was May when I went up there, and I had a superficial interview. They said, "Can you write?" I said, "Of course I can write, I'm a professional journalist." So they sat me down and said, "Just write something. Two pages." I said, "What about?" They said, "Take a look at the New York Times and give us a summary of what's on the front page." So I did it, in 15 minutes. I asked, "Do you want me to do it in Czech also?" They said, "Fine, translate it." I said, "I don't have to translate it; I'll write you another one in Czech." They made me record it. They said my voice was okay. They were looking for more of a baritone, they said, but added, "Your voice will be okay." I said, "I know it's okay, because I was broadcasting for about three years in Prague."



They took me in to Elmer Davis and we had a conversation about Prague. He said, "We'd like very much for you to work for us, but our methods are a little bit different," and I said, "I'll learn it." It was a short conversation, about ten minutes. They wanted to get the Czech and Hungarian programs started, in the summer of 1942. They already had a few Czechs there. They were broadcasting in English, German, Italian and French - and they tried me out in French, too! I did a show for them in French. The two French announcers were bastards. They looked down on me because I was a Hungarian and not a Frenchman. Anyway I did the show with them, and the bosses said, "Fine, you know all about radio" - I almost finished on time. The second show I did, they told me I had to use Yankee Doodle at the end as a sign-off; they hadn't told me that before.

A few months passed by, and I still worked for Trenton Trust Company, and then I got a call from Brackett Lewis or Lewis Revey, who was the son of a Hungarian preacher in Michigan, and a foreign service officer. They called me and said to come in for a test. This was August. Between May and August I did some things for them for which they gave me token amounts, 25 bucks or so, but I know I was officially hired on September first, 1942. But between May and September first, I did a couple of jobs for them. One was, they wanted me to train some people in how to put their script together for Czech and Hungarian consumption, because they were not quite sure.

When I came there there was a fellow whose name was Frank Dobo, a Hungarian guy who was the son of a Hungarian doctor general, a medical general, and this fellow later on married a Sulzberger girl. We sort of became friendly and he kind of took me under his wing. We were about the same age, and despite his lack of experience he was already preparing the Hungarian programs. So we started working together on the Hungarian, and then they told me to organize the Czechs and the Bulgarians and, unbelievably, also the Albanians, and Romanians. Raquello came in, and they gave him the Polish programs. He wanted the Czechs badly, and in the beginning they gave him the Czechs, and when they did Dr. Adolf Hofmeister, who was the chief of the service, and later on became the Czech ambassador to Paris, objected. "Why can't we have Borgida? His native tongue is Czech, he's a doctor of law from Czechoslovakia, he was a journalist, he worked for Radio Prague, and you are giving us a Polish guy?" They left Raquello in the job until the Czechs raised hell.

Q: What was your work like?



BORGIDA: I worked for the Czechs and the Hungarians every day; we must have done ten or 15 dry runs. I was also asked to write the script, rehearse it and produce it with these guys. The first time they got up before the microphone they were making big speeches: Rise, countrymen! So I had a terrible time getting this bombast and pomposity out of their announcing. That was the toughest job I had. Every time the Voice of America hired somebody they got up and wanted the nation they addressed to go on the barricades, not tomorrow but immediately if not sooner. I said, "Now, look, this is the way you read: on radio, especially short wave, you must be very natural, you must be a little bit slower, you must pronounce things a little bit clearer, and your diction must be a bit crisper, and you must have a little rise in tone and presentation. It's not a theatrical thing or a bombastic thing." This was my job, and they gave me a GS-3.

Most of the time I had to write scripts; there was not much production. So I wrote each day a Czech and a Hungarian script, and I did my job in 25 minutes, while all these guys were working on a feature for three and four hours. Originally I was assigned to Werner Michel, the head of production. He wanted me because of my languages. They were always short of people, so they kept assigning me to French and German shows as a producer. Connie Ernst took a shine to me. The two fellows in charge of the central European services were Lew Revey and a South African named Frank Cillie, and after a while it became sort of a joke with the boys from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Albania and Poland that they were being supervised by a Frank Cillie, and my recollection is that they made a presentation to Werner Michel and Houseman - I think it even went up to Elmer Davis - but Frank Cillie remained there, I think, for eight or nine or ten months when somebody else was put in, a foreign service officer. And there was a lady whose name was Elizabeth DeJour, who was in Broadcast Control. She allegedly understood a little Polish and Czech, and she was the one who read the scripts and passed on them politically. She was a highly intelligent woman.

There was a fellow from NBC - most of the production we learned those days was from NBC guys, and I want to give them credit - by the name of Oliver Nichols, who was the first guy who said to me, "Okay, I know you worked for Radio Prague, but this is what in American radio you should learn. First, you need a red and a blue pencil to mark your timing. You use the blue pencil for rehearsals, and the red pencil for the final timing. And you must have a stopwatch." They gave me a stopwatch; I was the tenth guy in the Voice of America with an official government stopwatch. It was marked 'OWI #10.' Timing with the watch was very difficult for me in the beginning because we didn't have this sort of thing in Prague. Time was important only when the main newscast started, but we could run over back and forth, and since most of my job was writing speeches for senators and congressmen and my boss the Minister of Commerce, they always let us run over or run short. So when I had to time everything down to 14 minutes and 30 seconds, at the beginning it gave me trouble, because every announcer read it differently in the rehearsal and on the air. And we had to rehearse everything. So for years every show was fully rehearsed, except when the scripts began coming in extremely late. I went on the air sometimes with a 15-minute or a half-hour show and I had only two pages in my hand: the opening and the closing and maybe a few headlines. It was almost catastrophic.



And here is something for which I claim credit from the very beginning. I said, "I can't work like this. These guys can't read, they don't know the subject." The scripts contained an awful lot of grammatical and stylistic errors, which I began to correct. They didn't let anybody correct anything, they said it must go on the air as it is. I said, "That's impossible! Sheer nonsense!" There were some translations that were verbatim, and didn't sound right. I said it would defeat what we were trying to achieve. And I began to correct the scripts in Czech and Hungarian. I made big changes. The only guy who appreciated it, much later, was Barry Zorthian. When they complained that Borgida is changing the scripts, he said, "More power to him; I saw some of his changes."

Q: Did you continue to concentrate on the Hungarian and Czech programs?

BORGIDA: Harold McGee came to me and asked, "What languages do you know?" I said, "I speak fluently Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, German, quite good French, and you hear my English, and I also know Russian, because I went in the Gymnasium when Russian was a mandatory language." They gave me a script, and I said, "This is not Russian, this is Bulgarian." They said, "You know Bulgarian?" I said, "No, I don't, but I can read this script," and started to do so. "You will be the supervisor of the Bulgarian Service," I was told. This is how these things came about.

Q: How did the Voice find the people to do the language broadcasts? To find people to make up the language staffs, they advertised in local Hungarian and Czech papers, and also by word of mouth. They called up the various organizations in New York City around 85th Street - and bear in mind there was horrendous unemployment. People who had been in this country for 15 or 20 years were absolutely useless. They had lost their language; they could still speak it, but that language could not go on the air. And they could not write. So we hired people who recently came over, and most of them had college degrees. Eventually everybody had college degrees. Some of them were professional journalists, some were lawyers, doctors, government employees, district attorneys, former diplomats, businessmen - these were the type of guys we hired. Only later did they hire people off the street when they needed languages badly, and that was a bad system because the first bunch of people, typical European intellectuals, or 85% of them, that 85% was the most valuable kernel, the core. They brought culture, they brought knowledge of the language, knowledge of the area, political knowledge, they knew what should and should not be in a script. Their only problem was they didn't know radio. And that was my job, to teach them radio.



BORGIDA: Harold McGee - who was the brother of Frank McGee, and was brought in from NBC to teach us production, said, "You know so many languages, why do you waste your time writing Hungarian scripts or Czech scripts? What are they paying you?" I said, "I'm now a GS-3." He said, "You work for me, I'll give you instantly a 9." So we went to Personnel, and a girl said, "Out of the question! Mr. Borgida made \$25 a week in the Trenton Trust Company. We can only pay him \$25 because nobody can make profit out of the war effort." And Harold McGee said, "Baloney!" He had given up a high-paying job at NBC to serve his country, a real patriot. So many people put their body and soul into the work at VOA for very little pay, only to be accused years later by McCarthy of disloyalty and kicked out, including one guy I trained and whose son was at the time on the high seas with the US Navy, and they let him go on the basis of absolutely stupid charges.

I don't want to claim complete credit for starting the Hungarian show, because Frank Dobo did a lot, we worked together. Frank Dobo couldn't write; I could write. He could time a show, and always carried a stopwatch, which was so silly to me. These guys were always carrying things like disks and records; I never carried anything. I was a pro; I didn't have to show I was in this business. It was difficult to enforce discipline in the beginning. Most of the guys who worked for me then were all big shots, and here I had to shove them around - I mean, literally shove them around - and teach them how to read. They asked about stage experience, and I said, "God forbid! I don't want anybody with stage experience." They wanted to act out with "Hitler!" and "Bismarck!" and "Roosevelt!" I said, "Don't shriek! Just say, President Roosevelt." It was a terrible fight; I was exhausted day in and day out, trying to cope with these intellectual prima donnas, who had had big jobs in Europe, and make them behave and make them radiowise. I would have to go in a studio and lock the door and close my eyes for 15 minutes before I drove home. This was the most difficult part.

Another difficult part was, they were supposed to write a 15-minute script but they would give me a 45-minute script and wouldn't let me cut it down. "Talk faster," they would say, and I'd say, "You cannot talk faster, the moment you talk faster the audience will not be able to understand you." So they'd cut out three minutes. This was an eternal battle, to cut the show down to 14:30. "Why 14:30, why not 15:30?! Can't you go over?" I'd say, "I can go over, but the transmitter will cut us off." "Well, tell them not to cut us off." The five seconds of dead air at the end of VOA programs was added at the request of the transmitters. People kept running over, and they always blamed the clock. So it was decided the programs would run to 14:20, leave five seconds of dead air, and then sign off with the service cue: "This program has come to you from the United States of America." Some people still ran through the dead air, and would say, "I didn't finish," and I'd say, "I know. The show is over." They'd say, "But I have to finish," and I'd say, "It's over!"



Sometimes, when I'd see that the guy would have seven minutes of script left with only three minutes on the clock, I'd go in the studio and have the technician cut the guy's mike, and I'd have my copy of the script - for a long time they gave scripts only to the announcers, not to the producer; Hotchner and Gene Kern and I fought bloody battles to give the producer a script - so I'd sit down at the mike, having marked optional cuts in my script, and finish the show. Then, "Oh, Borgida cut out half of the script! Broadcast Control, he cut the script!" I said, "I cut out the chaff and all the dirt." I had to go all the time to Broadcast Control, and the reaction was, "He made good cuts." Sometimes I laughed my head off. The editors never timed the scripts; later on I made them count lines. Even then, they always came in with 20 or 30 lines too many. Also, they'd make changes in the script, which would mix up the whole timing of the show. The head of Broadcast Control never once failed to sustain me in the cuts I had to make.

Q: Before you got to the studio you had to have a program laid out ready for broadcast. How was this handled?

BORGIDA: The way the programs were planned - every morning we'd have a meeting, where we'd be told what centrally-produced materials should be carried in that day's program, but the content of the rest of the program they left to the individual editor-in-chief. They told him, when you have doubts, check with the area guys. These later became branch chiefs and division chiefs, almost always foreign service officers. Some of these were excellent, but some of them unfortunately didn't know their ass from their elbow. But the vast majority were excellent. And they learned fast.

Anyway, it was the editor-in-chief who determined what went into the program. But they were always late. This was the most difficult part, at virtually all times at the Voice of America except in very modern times, that the scripts were awfully late. In those days, they wanted a man to read six, seven, even ten, 11 minutes, and I said, "That's impossible. The man hasn't seen the script, he will make mistakes." "Oh, no, he will not make mistakes." So I want to claim credit for this: I introduced by force the multi-voice technique. I split up the script among several voices. What I did was approved either by Werner Michel or Gene Kern, but I am positive that I did it. I cannot swear that I was the first one, but I think I was. Here I was stuck with the scripts, and here was a guy who didn't know what it was all about. So I said, "John, you read the first five minutes," and I marked up the scripts; the only reason I could do it was that I spoke the languages fluently. It was easy for me to see where to divide up a script. And I told the announcers, "When this man finishes, you try vocally to pick up that tone. Don't come in from another planet. Try to make it one show in three or five voices." They liked the idea, but in the beginning it was difficult. Very much depended on how I cut up that script, so that it didn't have three separate personalities, which would stink.



And I kept telling them - and I have to say, this I learned from Harold McGee - I always told them, "You don't address the nation. You don't have to send them on the barricades. Be natural, but be clear and lucid, and understand what you are reading." Harold McGee told me to tell them they're talking to only one guy, and maybe his wife, or one guy and his bosom buddy. Don't announce, just talk to them. The multi-voice technique worked because each guy had time to read his portion ahead of time. I taught them to underline for stress, how to use pauses. That was a big, big job to teach them to pause, the rhetorical pause. It shouldn't all just flow together. There was an awful lot of battle news, and it just didn't make sense, a mishmash. They stopped pausing when they looked down and saw they had nine pages and two minutes left; they wanted to race, but I said, "Cut the mike," and then said, "You are dumb, you are stupid, it doesn't go on the air, slow down, just get in whatever you can and I'll come in for the closing." In my years at the Voice of America, I closed in Hungarian, I closed in Slovak, Czech, Bulgarian, Russian, Serbian and Croatian, I even closed in Romanian - Albanian I could never quite manage - and I closed in Polish.

Q: What were the programs like in the early days?

BORGIDA: At the beginning, the programs consisted only of news. When I had my big test with Lew Revey and Frank Cillie, this is how the official test came. I came in at 9 o'clock, and they said to me, "We know you've had some experience but we cannot hire you unless your test is approved" - I don't know by whom. They gave me the New York Times, and they gave me the Herald Tribune, and they told me, "Here is the ticker. Put together what you see that you consider important for Central Europe" - not only Hungary, it was always the area that was stressed. At that time they didn't want it to be just sharply Hungary, the idea being that many people whose native tongue was Czech also understand Hungarian, because in Europe the nationalities are so close together. New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania all speak English. But in Europe in one country you might have one enclave that spoke Hungarian and one enclave that spoke Ruthenian and another enclave that spoke something else. This is why we boys who came out of Central Europe are considered geniuses. Actually, we're not, we picked up those languages on our way to the football field, because there were so many languages.



Anyway, they had me do ten minutes of news. So they went out for breakfast and said they'd be back and discuss it with me. They went out at 9 o'clock and I selected and wrote the ten minutes of news, and at 10 o'clock they hadn't shown up, so I decided to do what I had done back in March or April, do this in another language. When they still weren't back at 11, I went to the studio and said to one of the engineers, "I'm new here, would you do me a favor? I'm applying for a job, and I need to record a newscast." "How long is it?" "Oh, about nine minutes - I didn't want to say ten - so he said, "Sure, go ahead." So I read the whole thing in Hungarian, and again in Czech. Finally, these two guys came back around noon time, and they looked at the scripts and said, "Did you use a dictionary?" I said, "I didn't have to use a dictionary, they're both my native tongues." I said, "I'm sure they're correct, but you go on and read it." But they had to have it approved by somebody. They asked how I did, and I told them I had picked those items I thought would be of interest to Central Europe and left out those things that were aimed at an American audience or that would have to be explained, since stopping to explain a news item would kill it. They understood, and I gave them the disks I had recorded. They wanted to know where I did them, and I said, "Over there." I knew they were surprised and pleased, but they made no comment. They told me to come back the next day.

They said, "Okay, you can start working tomorrow, and Miss Carr will tell you how much your pay will be." They said, "By the way, what do you think should be in the shows?" I said, "All news is not enough. I would give them something else." "What would you do?" I said, "Well, I read the Herald Tribune and the Times, and I saw there's some very fine press articles. I would give them a short press review." "How would you do that?" "I would not give a verbatim editorial but take out prominent parts of these editorials or feature articles and put them together into a little package of three or four minutes and say, "This is what the American press is writing about." I don't claim that this is an original idea, because it has been done on American radio. When I came here, they used to give some press reviews. I thought a press review would make the show much more interesting. When we started working, they said, "Try to work in some press reviews." There was no feature yet, and no editorial. Everybody thought the press review picked up the show. Probably everybody in the world knows the New York Times and other famous papers, and I said it's like documentation. Later they added major European papers as well, and American papers outside New York, like the Hartford Courant and the Boston Globe. The trouble was that the press reviews came out a little late, because we got those papers later in the day. So somebody decided that the night shift should prepare the press review in English, but desks could still pick from the papers to supplement the centrally-prepared material, as long as it was approved by Broadcast Control.

Q: What other broadcasts were you associated with?



BORGIDA: They decided they would broadcast in Filipino, Tagalog, and they didn't know who should do the show. Somebody said, "Tagalog sounds probably like Spanish or Latin, but let's try Borgida because he knows a lot of languages including Latin and Greek, from the Gymnasium." I said, "This is crazy," but they said, "Wait till you see those cute little Filipino nurses," and when I saw them I volunteered! So I had the Tagalog broadcast, and it was a riot. I did the show for a while, not too long, and said we've got to get someone who knows Tagalog, then they transferred the show to San Francisco when the Far East broadcasts were moved out there. But from then on I always protested the assigning of people to shows they did not understand. I said, "If you have nobody, okay, put in a body, but make sure that body has a finger and does not fall asleep during the show, and can count to 14."

There were guys who came to us from advertising agencies who didn't have any idea of what this thing was all about. They kept throwing cues, and never looked at the clock. There was one guy whose wife was a buyer at Bonwit Teller, and he kept telling me, "I don't need this job. My wife is making \$25 thousand a year, easily" - and that was a heck of a lot of money then. They gave this guy a GS-12, because what you were making in civilian life established your grade. When Harold McGee found out about this, and Borgida a 3, he absolutely hit the ceiling. McGee even turned in his resignation, and went to Elmer Davis, who asked the personnel officer, "What can you give him right away?" She said a 9, because he has a doctor's degree, he speaks the languages, et cetera. It still did not come through for about nine or ten months, and McGee went to his superiors, who called in Miss Carr and said, "If this man doesn't get an 11" - and finally, in about three months, I got my 11. Then I was quiet and Harold McGee was quiet, and said, "As soon as possible I'll get you a 12." Because they gave 12's to all these guys from the ad agencies.

Q: Was there any coordination between the work of the Voice of America and the military psychological warfare operations?

BORGIDA: When I was there I was not aware of any coordination with the military psychological warfare operations overseas, but I'm sure there were efforts in this regard. I'm not a good source for this kind of information because I was not involved in policy matters. I was the guy on the line. I knew that they put lines into the French script on a particular day, something like, "The peach blossoms are out in Normandy," I had those, yes. I had lines like this in the German show, and occasionally there would be a line like this in the Hungarian or the Romanian show. They always had it a big secret. Only the editor knew: put this right in here, and don't move it. I never knew who gave us these lines, we were just given them. At the beginning there was always an admiral or a general in charge of Broadcast Control.



Q: You noted that you were classified 1-A. How did you keep from being drafted? Every three months, they had to ask for my deferment, since I had been classified 1-A from the beginning. They would not accept Werner Michel or John Houseman's signature on the deferment requests, but only Elmer Davis's, and they would not grant a deferment for six months, only three. It became a joke, every three months my deferment from the military, signed by Elmer Davis, "his work is essential to the war effort because of his knowledge of languages, his education, he'll be much more useful to the war effort." And this went on and on, every three months. My father-in-law was a general in the American army, and he was a little bit embarrassed that I wasn't in uniform. He wanted me to stop accepting this deferment and come into the army. "You can probably do intelligence work in the army," he said. He wanted to see me in uniform, and he really put pressure on me. To him this was still an office job. I decided I was not going to ask for any more deferments, and was going into the army. I told my superiors I realized they wanted to keep me, but that I could probably do the same kind of thing in the military service, and that my family wanted me to. They told me, "No. We want you to stay here. Don't be a romantic about it." I said, "This is not romanticism, this is my father-in-law who is an army officer and would like to see his son-in-law in uniform." Well, they decided to make me a regional production supervisor.

BORGIDA: That was my title, and it came with a grade GS-12. And that's the way it was till the end of the war when the Voice was taken over by the State Department. Then I became executive producer for the European Division. They took it away from Raquello for various reasons and put him in the Russian service. They gave me the Hungarian, the Czech, the Romanian, the Polish - against my will - at one time the Greek and Turkish services, so it was the whole European Division, except for French, German and Italian. I never supervised those, until they became feeds as part of the European Division, along with Spanish. When we switched from air shows to feeds there was a heck of a lot of work. It was decided that direct broadcasts were no longer necessary to Western Europe because other sources of information were available, with newspapers on the stands in all these countries. We would therefore feed Radio Paris, and RAI - that's where I met George Gatti - and Munich for RIAS. It was a lot of work, so much I couldn't handle it. I asked for a deputy, and that's when I got Sokolowsky for my deputy.

Q: So you stayed on with VOA in the post-war period.



BORGIDA: After the war, my wife suggested I should take a test in English, in case they cut out, or down, the language broadcasts that I had been supervising. Or maybe I should be able to translate from Czech into English and vice versa. She and her father insisted I put in my pocket a little dictionary in case I got stuck, English-Hungarian, not Hungarian-English. So when I finished the test in Czech and Hungarian, and had already recorded it on the disk, I said, "I'm going to do this now in English so my wife and father-in-law can see that I did what I did," because they could not read Czech. So quickly I typed it out in English. And while I always spoke with an accent, my English was fluent from having worked for the New York Times bureau in Prague. I did for them a radio roundup every night. I listened to the Czech, Hungarian and all those radios and put them into English. I spoke English when I was twelve years old, but I was fracturing the language in the early days of my work with the Times as a stringer. That's when I met my wife, Lelia Lee, who helped with the translations. And with that practice, within a year I was writing the roundup in English perfectly.

As the years went on, and I wondered whether the Czech and Hungarian and others might not last, I wondered whether I should switch to English, and my wife and father-in-law were very encouraging: maybe you should ask for a job with the news desk. I never really had the guts to go down there and ask for a job on the news desk, but some other guys did, and a number of them failed miserably. But some of them stayed, because their English was fairly good and they were useful on the news desk. Their English was never really good. My English, compared to some of those guys, was superior, but I thought it would require a lot of chutzpah.

Q: What was life in VOA like in the early fifties, with the change in administration and the McCarthy investigation?

BORGIDA: When the Republicans took over the government in January 1953, the rumor was that they would replace all the people with their Republican dependents, people who are qualified for this job. And truthfully at the beginning a lot of people thought that this was almost a legitimate thing because in the United States when one party wins all the street and highway workers are replaced with their own people, the Republicans go out and the Democrats come in and vice versa. I had a secretary who thought her father in Pennsylvania was laid off because he was a Democrat and they took in a Republican foreman. So we were basically prepared for a change. But we thought the change would come in management, the political appointees and the higher-ups would be asked to resign or be transferred and Republican big-wigs and protġ½gġ½s would come in.



Basically we accepted it, although it was hard to accept. But when it came down to firing rank and file, people who served us faithfully and patriotically, putting in millions of hours - and there was no overtime in those days, a lot of people got the flat sum of \$20 a month. Some people might have worked, instead of 48 hours in a week, 150 hours. So people got upset about it. And to be told you have to go to see Cohn and Schine for hearings, they got very much upset. Some people were laid off, some people were accused of being Communist sympathizers, or even outright Communists. It was just not so. I can mention, for example, a fellow whose name was Otto Rado, a Hungarian and an excellent announcer-producer who had been with us from the beginning. His son was a signalman in the Navy. And they fired him. They accused him of being a Communist sympathizer. That was not true. The reason they gave was that at some Hungarian festival on 85th Street he had recited a poem that was written in 1848 by the poet Sandor Petofi, and this poem had revolutionary tones. But of course in 1848 it was against the Tsar and the Austrian emperor! And they fired this guy. It was absolutely outrageous.

I was told to come to the hearings, but I declined to go - adamantly declined to go. I said if you want some affidavits or this or that I'll be glad to give them to you, but I refused to tell them whether I was a Republican or a Democrat or a Polka Dot, and said, "I'm an American citizen and can be anything I want to be politically. If you don't like my job, fire me for that." There was a fellow by the name of Paul Deac, who was after me to come and have my say because I knew the whole division, and he mentioned certain names that he wanted my views and opinions about, but I said, "No, I'm not going to do this. I'm not interested; get yourself somebody else." I told him, "I'm an immigrant in this country, I'm grateful that I have this job, and I'm not going to testify except in a legitimately convoked court or if necessary at the Senate." "Well," he said, "we'll call you to the Senate." But I said, "I'm not going to go to Cohn and Schine, that's not good enough for me." They still kept after me, but after a while, he laid off, and they left me alone. But there was an investigation of me, and I was completely cleared. It was signed by General Snow, who was the chairman of this board, and it had the testimony of people who had known me not only for the last ten years but also some people who had known me in Prague.

Q: Tell me about the so-called Loyal American Underground in VOA, that worked with Cohn and Schine in the McCarthy investigation of the Voice.



BORGIDA: The Loyal American Underground was considered a joke. It was not taken seriously. People thought President Eisenhower would not go along with this activity. I knew about three or four members of this so-called Underground, but there were others who surreptitiously provided names and false accusations. Not too many. There was one whom I cannot name because I do not have any evidence, but that was the only guy who could have wanted my job or the job that was held by Otto Rado. But I have no factual evidence. There were a lot of people who opposed some of the English announcers who worked at so-called "progressive" stations. One was at WQXR - I don't know what was progressive about WQXR, it was a music station. Mel Elliot was a fine guy, a very intelligent and good announcer. They accused him of all sorts of things, and there I offered to testify. I said I have known Mel for about three years, and I'll testify that Mel is a 100% patriotic American and a superb radio man. I never heard him say anything that would indicate anything but devotion to the United States. It was just silly.

I have no direct evidence, by personal contact or observation, that there were more than six or seven people in this Underground. One was an ex-Army officer who beat his chest all the time and who pretended to be on both sides of the fence, but I know he was fingering people he just didn't like. I had one argument with this guy, one discussion, and I was pretty sharp, and he seemed to be wavering.

There were rumors about Howard Hotchner, but I have to say that Howard Hotchner was first and foremost a good American and a Republican. He could have been a Republican zealot, but I did consider Howard Hotchner an honest man. I really did. And I don't think that Howard Hotchner could be accused of unethical activities. I just don't have knowledge that he hurt anybody. I knew that Howard disliked some people, but I have no knowledge that he hurt some people. These people were basically Republican zealots who wanted to please Cohn and Schine. They pretended they knew Senator McCarthy, but I knew in many cases this was not true. I know of one specific case where a friend of mine, an American journalist, asked Sen. McCarthy, "Do you know so-and-so?" Sen. McCarthy asked the journalist, "Why do you want to know? He said, "I want to know because a friend of mine was almost hurt by this guy, and he said he's working for you." And Sen. McCarthy said, "This man never worked for me."



Bob Bauer called me in one day and said, "Tibor, I think your job is in danger." At first I said, "I don't believe it." He said, "Somebody accused you of being a Communist sympathizer." And he laughed and said, "I know it's ridiculous, but you are in danger. See if you want to get a lawyer, see if you get an affidavit." I said, "All right, I'll get an affidavit." I asked, "For whom am I getting it?" He said, "I'm not so sure. You probably know him." I mentioned about six or seven names, and he told me, "One of these guys I suspect, but I'm not going to tell you which one." I know who that guy was. They were false accusations most of the time. Not one of the guys who were laid off then, whom I knew well, was either a Communist sympathizer or a Communist, and they worked for us all those years absolutely patriotically, devotedly. They hurt people who came to us, originally from Europe, who were Social Democrats, and they confused Social Democrats with Communism. They were Social Democratic like Sweden, Norway and Denmark. That's the kind of Social Democrats they were. They hated Communists; they fought Communists. And they were laid off. Some of these guys began to look for jobs, not wanting to wait till their heads were chopped off.

It was a very sad period. Salaries were very meager in those days. Some of us, like myself, had an offer long before the war was over to come and work for CBS. And finally, when the war was over, I had a standing offer to go to CBS with another guy, to do their short wave or whatever. It would have meant more money. But many of us thought, "We started with them, we'll stick it out as long as they need us. They trusted us when we were greenhorns; they gave us responsible jobs. And we're going to stick it out with them as long as they need us. We're not going to resign in order to get \$500 or \$600 - or even \$5,000 - more." This is the truth: there was a whole band of people who decided to stick it out with the Voice of America because the Voice of America - the Office of War Information and the Department of State - they trusted us in their time of need, we will trust them now when we don't need them because they were good to us. And most people stayed, not all. Those who came from the commercial agencies jumped ship right away, the moment there was a job in private enterprise. There was a time when I was doing all sorts of things because these 14's and 15's all resigned, quickly. They got their old jobs or went into other jobs, and they used their experience with the Voice of America as a jumping board. There was the son of a Congressman, who was falsely accused of being a drunkard, an alcoholic, and he stayed on, too.

Q: The Voice moved to Washington in the fall of 1954. What was your involvement in that move?



BORGIDA: When the time came for the move to Washington, Mr. Poppele (the then Director of the Voice) told me he wanted me to come with him to Washington and look the situation over and tell him what I needed for the European Division, which was supposed to move first. He wanted me to see the premises. I was delighted, although originally I thought, "This is crazy, to move us from the seat of information, New York, the seat of the world, to move us to a hick town like Washington. Where will we find the people, where will we broadcast from, what resources will we have?" I was also one of those who didn't want to move. But then they said you must move or lose your job, and I said I'll try it. Then I became one of the guys who said I don't oppose the move, and Poppele found out about it and invited me to come with him to Washington. We drove down in his car and stayed in an elegant hotel. We arrived late at night, and he could barely wait to show me the premises the next day. When we went to the new place he said, "This is where your office will be," and I didn't see the office, all I saw was the Capitol of the United States, mighty, almighty. And I thought, "My God! I, Tibor Borgida from Ungvar, Hungary, am going to work in the foothills of the United States Capitol?" I was sold! There I was on Broadway surrounded by those little restaurants, and here was the magnificent Mall on a beautiful, gorgeous sunny day, and there was the Capitol. He took me around. He said, "After we go through the premises we'll go to the Capitol and the White House." The new place was spacious, and we changed some things around, and I said, "I'm all for it." He said, "You're kidding," and I said, "No, I'm all for it. I'll like to be here in Washington." He was very pleased about that. The administrative man asked about the square feet I needed, and I couldn't think in terms of feet but in meters, so I had to demonstrate the size of the rooms our people would need. We got brand new furniture, but we brought down the typewriters and other office and technical equipment from New York. We were able to arrange the offices the way we wanted, service by service.

Q: How was the actual move handled, in terms of keeping programs on the air?

BORGIDA: As for the shows, there was a transition. Some people stayed behind in New York to do the last broadcasts from the old studios. I did the last show there, and traveled to Washington. We prerecorded some shows, but left one person there to read news headlines, explaining to the listeners that we were terminating broadcasts from New York and would begin broadcasting from Washington the next day. A lot of staffers took rooms in Washington and went back to their families in New York on weekends. I came here with my wife Anne and two little children, I brought them with me right away; David was two and a half and Gene was almost five and a half. Would you ever have believed it, that David, my second-born son, is the Voice of America's US Senate correspondent? It's incredible for me to believe that the son of an immigrant from the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains...It's a shame that my mother and father never could see it.



Q: What do you think of the role of the foreign service officer in the management of VOA, including the fact that every supervisory position is designated for occupancy by such officers?

BORGIDA: I worked under at least 20 foreign service officers. The very best of them was a man named Spencer M. King, a superb gentleman, well educated, didn't know Europe very well but learned quickly. I also liked Bob Delaney, who I know didn't have many friends. He was bright and quick, became a director at the Ed Murrow Institute. I worked very well with all of them, and I'll tell you the reason why. It was a basic feature of my operating: if somebody is your boss, you work with him. You can argue with him, but once the boss says to do it, you either do it or quit. And I established a very fine working relationship with all these foreign service officers. I realized that they are the native-born Americans and I'm a naturalized American. I realized they knew the United States better than I did. And they realized that I knew Europe, to which we were broadcasting, better than they did. And somehow the two skills and the two knowledges meshed. And meshed to the benefit of the output. And we got along fine.

We also socialized, to a degree; we went out to lunch together frequently. I seldom went to their houses even if they invited me, but I had very frequent lunches with these guys, a beer here, a martini there, and I had this type of a relationship with all of them. I know John Lund was not popular, but John Lund came in with very good intentions. He was heavily undercut by Alex Barmine, the moment he came in. Klieforth was good, but I was a little bit disappointed when he became program manager. I expected that the man who learned so much on the first floor and the basement of this institution directly with the languages, I thought that in the job of the program manager he would be more innovative, more daring, more radio conscious, you know. Overall I must say that the people with whom I worked I was impressed with. I forgot to mention Jack Crockett. I liked Jack Crockett. Jack Crockett was a very sensitive American intellectual. I didn't like Clem Scerback. I liked Joe Kolarek to a degree. He was a terrific reporter, he was a good writer, formerly AP. He always told me I looked like his father. They came from Czechoslovakia, you know. I had a very fine relationship with some of these guys. As a matter of principle, I don't think all of the supervisors should have been foreign service officers. As a matter of principle, I think that some of the rank and file should have been promoted. We have had some very fine service chiefs and some very fine editors who should have been elevated to higher jobs. And we had two such appointments as division chief with Bob Bauer and John Albert. I had high regard for John Albert. I thought John was one of the smartest guys on or without wheels. John Albert was the fastest writer in any language you can think of. His mind was sharp, his knowledge was good. Bob Bauer was a good organizer, a good division chief, but as far as content is concerned, I have reservations. He did an excellent job of organizing us here. And Bob Bauer was also quite good with people; he could handle people. He was the first non-foreign service officer to become Division chief, promoted into it from the ranks. As were John Albert and Alex Klieforth, although Klieforth was different because his father and brother were diplomats.



Q: Thank you, Tibor.

End of interview